

Furthering the Continuum of Care for Veterans at the Washington Soldiers Home and Colony

Overview

Role of State Veterans Homes:

Washington state's three Veterans Homes provide 24-hour nursing and domiciliary care to medically indigent veterans. Veterans served by State Veterans Homes qualify for federal reimbursements not available in private nursing homes. These services offset the cost of care otherwise incurred through state Medicaid programs.

Forecasting Future Needs:

The state legislature responded to a 1998 feasibility study by providing several directives to the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA). The Statewide Master Plan, submitted in November 2000, forecasts the demand for future services and outlines programs and services to be offered at the State's Veterans Homes.

While the veteran population declined nationally by 5% over the past ten years, (according to the 2000 U.S. Census) Washington state's veteran population actually increased by 3.8% for a total of 670,628 veterans. The demographics of the population are changing as well, for example:

- ★ Veterans over age 85 will increase by 223% between 2000 and 2020;
- ★ Veterans between age 65 and 69 will increase by 10% or 21,000, totaling 80,500 in 2015;
- ★ Female veterans over age 65 will increase by 35%; and
- ★ Female veterans between 55 and 64 will increase by 116%.

In addition to the increasing number of veterans eligible for services, WDVA faces the challenge of replacing functionally obsolete nursing facilities. As outlined in the 2000 Statewide Master Plan, WDVA will address the need for a new nursing facility and the growth in veteran population in the following manner:

- ★ Consolidation of nursing services at the Washington Veterans Home at Retsil with replacement construction of a 240-bed nursing facility; and
- ★ Provision of a Continuum of Care at the Washington Soldiers Home at Orting, including three levels of care: Light Nursing, Domiciliary, and Transitional Residence.

Responding to Needs:

Service providers catering to the state's homeless veteran population are struggling with changing federal requirements and a lack of stable housing for participants. In Washington State, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) operates approximately 300 beds as Residential Program beds for honorably discharged veterans. The discontinuation of the U.S. DVA's contract housing program will likely reduce this number further, leaving an even larger number of veterans without services.

Providing a Continuum of Care:

The *Continuum of Care* proposed for the Washington Soldiers Home takes into account the U.S. DVA's changing requirements. The program will provide services to homeless or potentially homeless veterans, while continuing to provide light nursing and domiciliary care.

While the three levels of care are consistent with the needs of veterans throughout the state, the number of veterans served in each program will fluctuate based on the needs of the population. Of great importance, is the need to provide care to veterans who otherwise would have care provided to them through other public services, often at a higher cost to the state.

Because program changes at the Washington Soldiers Home are based upon the completion of the nursing facility at the Washington Veterans Home, current programs will continue at the Soldiers Home until mid-2005.

As with all services provided at the State Veterans Homes, only honorably discharged veterans are eligible. All veterans are - and will continue to be - screened to determine eligibility and to ensure the safety of Veterans Home residents and surrounding communities.

The Transitional Residence Program will provide a *hand-up* to struggling veterans who have made a commitment to turn their lives around. The Transitional Residence Program is a transitional living experience, which is time limited (six months approximate length of stay) and goal oriented. At the end of six months, veterans will be expected to obtain independent housing, employment and/or disability income and sustain treatment for addictions and/or other mental health disorders.

Core services to be offered by the Transitional Residence Program will include: case management, care coordination, vocational rehabilitation, counseling, recovery groups, life skills training/education and social services. Light nursing services will include 24-hour nursing care, comprehensive medical benefits, pharmacy services, religious, recreational and social programs. The residential program supports an aging-in-place concept in a well-rounded social environment.

Creating Partnerships:

In order to meet the needs of the state's veterans, WDVA continues to establish partnerships with the U.S. DVA and state, county, and community based service providers. The participation of these providers, veterans organizations and community members is critical to ensuring success. WDVA is, above all, concerned about the care and security of veterans currently served at the Veterans Homes. Transition planning and implementation will be designed to minimize any adverse impact on current residents.

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